1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
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Chapter XI

THE COUNCIL OF THE ELDERS

1

GRANMAN Yankuso's day began before the break of dawn. When the day was at its coolest men's hearts were cool, people said here on the river, and when hearts were cool they could be trusted with weighty matters. But long before men came to stand outside the Granman's house advising with him as he lay in his hammock, the women arrived to report in low monotones the happenings of the previous day, and to take orders for the one to follow.

Lying in our hammocks in the council house, separated from the speakers by the wall of palings and perhaps five feet of clearing, we could hear voices outside from a little after three in the morning, until with the coming day the soft footfalls died down and gave way to the sound of stamping mortars and the cries of children recalling their mothers from early tasks.

What was being said outside we could not hear, but as the days wore on we learned to recognize the voices of the speakers. We learned to know from the rapid, contradicting flow of words which followed upon one of the Granman's orders, that it was his principal wife who spoke, or from the halting, crooning phrases, the voice of his eldest daughter, who had mastered her father's gentlest intonations and now of a morning brought them forth as though she were speaking her lesson. We learned to know as well the range and intensity of the subdued grunts with which

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the Granman punctuated the pauses of the men, though not often their meaning.

But whatever the reports of the women, and the commands given by the Granman, the word for white man interspersed all of the morning's recitals, and the questions of the Granman and the answers often came fast.

Of the men, the Granman asked little. They came up in pairs usually, and now one, now the other took up the report. Clan names were spoken, and occasionally a village name was mentioned, but on the morning preceding the council of the chiefs, only one village was discussed, and one clan. The name of the village was the forbidden one where we had stopped for the night against the Granman's orders, and the clan was that of one group of our paddlers.

2

Early on the morning after our arrival at Asindopo Lantiwe, our paddlers came to see us in the council house. The Granman was busy outside his own house with the chiefs who had gathered for the council meeting, and these men who, like ourselves, were strangers here, came as comrades of an adventurous journey to visit with us and talk over the impressiveness of our reception and the allure of the women of the Granman's village, who were famous everywhere on the river. It was a village where chastity among the girls was closely watched, and where its women were given in marriage to the most influential men on the river.

The men were gotten up splendidly. Their bodies glistened with oil, their cloths were made of the long strips, pieced together by their women, and of patterns which the sun's rays had had no chance to pale. Sedefo's was particularly fine, we thought, but he assured us that it did not compare with the one the river had claimed. His cloth was also made of strips, but the stitching which connected them was a lacy weave, worked in triangles, and made to resemble the vertebrae of a snake. The border was of triangular

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GLOSSARY AND LINGUISTIC NOTES

THE language of the Saramacca Bush Negroes is called by them the *Saramacca tongo*—the Saramacca tongue. Though there are many African words in ritual and everyday speech, the Saramacca tongo is essentially Negro-Portuguese, with a sprinkling of English and Dutch words. In the city of Paramaribo the Negroes speak *taki-taki*, Negro-English, though Dutch and Portuguese words are also found. The structure of the language of both bush and coastal Negroes is essentially African, that is to say, in all the borrowings it was the word which was borrowed, while the African idiom was retained, so that it may be said that the Negroes speak African dialects translated into English or Portuguese or Dutch. Simple examples of this are such phrases as "carry come" for "bring"; "carry go" for "take away"; or "hunger kills me" for "I am hungry"; or "one time" for "immediately."

For the correspondences between the languages of the Suriname Negroes and of West Africa, we have relied on various dictionaries and grammars of West African languages, and on our own findings made during our field work on the West African coast. In writing the words of Suriname and West African languages in both the glossary and the body of this book, the vowels have the "continental" values, not those given in English. It is to be noted that diacritical marks which would be necessary to indicate the strong nasalization that characterizes Bush Negro speech have been omitted from both text and glossary, in order to simplify the writing of native terms. Finally, we must

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2: Kahn D-5 (1922-1930) 1931
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Equatorial Africa were accustomed to the use of many broad, open vowels, and "no faucal gutturals or abruptly collocated consonants" (H. H. Johnson). Talkee-talkee is fluent and euphonious, with many haunting phrases and graceful involutions. The phrase that designates the spider stories, *anansi-tories*, is markedly musical; *balata bleeding*, with its succession of broad vowels, is a memorable term.

The early rebels came from many different tribes, and were thrown into contact with alien races. Some common language was a necessity; talkee-talkee is the result. But despite the importation of many foreign words, the dominating characteristic of talkee-talkee is the pure intonation of the West African tongues.

The musical effect is enhanced by the use of distinct tones, and words or phrases are often sung in a sustained pitch, in a manner made familiar to Western ears by the Chinese language. The phrase that occurs on page 45, *So matti, fie you tang*, is intoned with a rising inflection, prolonged on the last word. Sharp inflections of single words are also common, such as the word for the palate, *tu-tu*. But the musical nature of talkee-talkee is most evident when the Bush Negroes are communicating across the water. We have already described how they talk from one canoe to another, across great distances, by lowering their voices and drawing out the tones resonantly. There is still ringing in our ears the long drawn-out *Ah-e-e-e* of the boatmen, sounding across the yellow waters of the Surinam.

The individual words are strung together with very loose